

1                   **SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR ADAPTIVE CLUTTER FILTERING IN**  
2                   **ULTRASOUND COLOR FLOW IMAGING**

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4                   **CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS**

5    **[0001]**     This is a continuation—and claims the priority benefit of—U.S. patent application  
6    number 10/167,606 for a “System and Method for Adaptive Clutter Filtering in Ultrasound  
7    Color Flow Imaging” filed June 11, 2002 and now U.S. patent number \_\_\_\_\_; U.S.  
8    patent application number 10/167,606 is a continuation-in-part of U.S. patent application  
9    number 10/081,542 for a “User Interface for Handheld Imaging Devices” filed February 20,  
10   2002 and now abandoned which is a continuation-in-part of U.S. patent application number  
11   09/860,209 for a “Miniaturized Ultrasound Apparatus and Method” filed May 18, 2001 and  
12   now U.S. patent number 6,569,102 which is a continuation of U.S. patent application number  
13   09/378,175 for a “Miniaturized Ultrasound Apparatus and Method” filed August 20, 1999 and  
14   now U.S. patent number 6,251,073; U.S. patent application number 10/167,606 also claims  
15   the priority benefit of U.S. provisional patent application number 60/370,632 for “Broad-  
16   Beam Imaging” filed April 5, 2002.

17   **[0002]**     This application is related to U.S. patent application number 10/039,910 for a  
18   “System and Method for Coupling Ultrasound Generating Elements to Circuitry” filed  
19   October 20, 2001 and U.S. patent application number 10/101,661 for a “System and Method  
20   for Post-Processing Ultrasound Color Doppler Imaging” filed March 19, 2002 and now U.S.  
21   patent number 6,663,567.

22   **[0003]**     The above-related applications are commonly assigned and are incorporated  
23   herein by reference.

1   **FIELD OF THE INVENTION**

2

3   **[0004]**   This invention relates to filtering in general and to filtering ultrasound data in  
4   particular.

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6   **DESCRIPTION OF THE PRIOR ART**

7   **[0005]**   Ultrasonic imaging is a frequently used method of analysis for examining a wide  
8   range of media and objects. Ultrasonic imaging is especially common in medicine because of  
9   its relatively non-invasive nature, low cost, and fast response times. For example, ultrasonic  
10   imaging is commonly used to detect and monitor the growth and health of fetuses, or to detect  
11   and assist in the diagnosis of liver and kidney pathology. Typically, ultrasonic imaging is  
12   accomplished by generating and directing ultrasonic sound waves (an ultrasonic beam or  
13   signal) into a medium under investigation using a set of ultrasound generating transducers and  
14   then observing reflections generated at the boundaries of dissimilar materials, such as tissues  
15   within a patient, also using a set of ultrasound receiving transducers. The generating and  
16   receiving transducers may be arranged in arrays and a single transducer may be used for both  
17   generating and receiving ultrasonic signals. The reflections are converted to electrical signals  
18   by the receiving transducers and then processed, using techniques known in the art, to  
19   determine the locations of echo sources. The resulting data is displayed using a display  
20   device, such as a monitor.

21   **[0006]**   Typically, the ultrasonic signal transmitted into the medium under investigation is  
22   generated by applying continuous or pulsed electronic signals to an ultrasound generating  
23   transducer. In diagnostic imaging, the transmitted ultrasonic signal is generally in the radio

1 frequency (RF) range of 1 MHz to 15 MHz, which corresponds to ultrasonic wavelengths in  
2 the range of 0.1 mm to 1.5 mm. The ultrasonic signal propagates through the medium under  
3 investigation and reflects off interfaces, such as boundaries, between adjacent tissue layers.  
4 Scattering of the ultrasonic signal refers to the deflection of the ultrasonic signal in many  
5 directions by interfaces that are much smaller than the ultrasonic wavelength. Attenuation of  
6 the ultrasonic signal is the loss of ultrasonic signal as the signal travels. Reflection of the  
7 ultrasonic signal is the bouncing off of the ultrasonic signal from an object (*e.g.*, a vessel wall)  
8 that is similar in size or larger than the ultrasonic wavelength. Transmission of the ultrasonic  
9 signal is the passing of the ultrasonic signal through a medium. As it travels, the ultrasonic  
10 signal is scattered, attenuated, reflected, and/or transmitted. The portions of the reflected  
11 and/or scattered ultrasonic signals that return to the transducers are detected as echoes.

12 [0007] In the ultrasound art, steering refers to changing the direction of an ultrasonic  
13 beam. Aperture refers to the size of the transducer or group of transducer elements being used  
14 to transmit or receive an ultrasonic signal. The transmit aperture is the size of the transducer  
15 or group of transducers used to transmit an ultrasound signal, and receive aperture is the size  
16 of the transducer or group of transducers used to receive an ultrasound signal. Apodization  
17 refers to applying a weighting profile to the signals across the transducer aperture to produce  
18 ultrasound beams with reduced sidelobe spreading. Electronic focusing refers to applying  
19 relative time and/or phase shifts to signals across the transmit or receive transducer array  
20 elements to account for time-of-flight differences.

21 [0008] A conventional process of producing, receiving, and analyzing an ultrasonic  
22 signal (or beam) is called beam forming. The production of ultrasonic signals optionally  
23 includes apodization, steering, focusing, and aperture control. In conventional beamforming,

1 RF echo data is acquired across a transducer array and processed to generate a one-  
2 dimensional set of echolocation data. In a typical implementation, a plurality of ultrasonic  
3 beams are used to scan a multi-dimensional volume.

4 [0009] In electronic focusing, the transmit aperture of the transducer is apodized and  
5 electronically focused to form a transmit beam, and a large number (typically over 100) of  
6 transmit beams are generated and steered (as for a sector scan) along different scan lines to  
7 cover the entire scan plane.

8 [0010] To create two-dimensional (2D) B-mode images of tissue and 2D color flow  
9 images of moving blood, the echoes are detected and converted into electronic signals by the  
10 receive transducer aperture elements. Through parallel electronic channels the signals in  
11 different frequency bands are subject to amplification, digitization, frequency downshifting,  
12 apodization, focusing, steering and other filtering operations in order to generate echolocation  
13 data along the scan direction. Depending on the front-end architecture design, the order in  
14 which the above processing are performed may vary. Any processing such as amplification,  
15 which occurs before digitization would be implemented using analog electronic circuits.

16 [0011] In most ultrasound receivers, the echo signals are shifted down in frequency by  
17 means of frequency mixers and filters, to generate the in-phase (I) and quadrature (Q) signals  
18 which are centered at a much reduced RF frequency, but contain the same information.  
19 bandwidth as the RF signals. For color flow processing, the RF spectrum is shifted down to  
20 baseband and the resultant I/Q components are also referred to as baseband components. The  
21 advantage of using I/Q echo components is that they can be digitized and processed at much  
22 lower sampling rates due to their reduced Nyquist bandwidths.

23 [0012] The I/Q echo data is furnished to the B-mode and color flow image processors for

1 amplitude and motion detection respectively. For B-mode, the echo amplitude can be  
2 computed simply by taking the square root of  $I^2+Q^2$ . The detected data from different transmit  
3 events are compiled into 2D acoustic data sets, which are then converted by the scan-converter  
4 into X-Y format of, for example, 480x640 pixels (picture elements), for video display.

5 [0013] In B-mode imaging, the brightness of a pixel is based on the detected echo  
6 amplitude, whereas in color flow imaging, the color of a pixel is based on mean velocity  
7 and/or power of detected echoes from moving parts of the medium under investigation. In  
8 color flow imaging, the color flow image is formed within a region of interest (ROI), which is  
9 over-written onto the B-mode image by a video image processor such that, for example, the  
10 composite image depicts blood flow within the ROI according to a color scale, while  
11 surrounding stationary tissues are displayed in a gray-scale.

12 [0014] In color flow imaging, for each scan line within the user-specified ROI, a set of  
13 transmit beams are fired repeatedly at some pulse repetition frequency (PRF), in order to  
14 detect moving blood. Fundamentally, any motion of the medium under investigation relative  
15 to the ultrasound transducer produces the well-known Doppler effect in which the frequency  
16 of the reflected echo is shifted from that of the transmit frequency  $f_o$  by an amount  $f_d$  that is  
17 proportional to the target speed in the direction of the ultrasonic beam. That is, the frequency  
18 of the reflected signal is  $f_o+f_d$ . A medium under investigation that is moving towards the  
19 transducer will compress the incident ultrasonic wave thereby producing a positive Doppler  
20 frequency shift in the reflected echo. Conversely, a target that is moving away from the  
21 transducer will produce a negative Doppler frequency.

22 [0015] Mathematically, the Doppler frequency shift  $f_d$  can be derived as follows.  
23 Suppose the target (e.g. red blood cells) is moving at velocity  $v$ , which makes an angle  $\phi$  with

1 respect to the sound beam. This means that the target velocity component in the direction of  
2 the sound waves is  $u = v \cos(\phi)$ . Over a short time interval  $\Delta t$ , the change in round-trip  
3 distance between the target and the ultrasonic source (transducer) is  $\Delta d = 2u \Delta t$ . Assuming  
4  $u \ll c$  (speed of sound),  $\Delta d$  translates into a phase shift  $\Delta\theta = 2\pi \Delta d / \lambda$ , where  $\lambda = c/f_0$  is the  
5 ultrasound wavelength. Hence, the Doppler frequency shift induced by target motion is  
6

$$f_d = \Delta\theta/(2\pi\Delta t) = 2f_0(u/c) = 2f_0(v/c) \cos(\phi).$$

7 [0016] In practice, Doppler frequencies due to blood flow in humans and animals are in  
8 the kHz range, which are much smaller than the transmit radio frequencies. A minimum of  
9 two transmit signals must be fired along each scan line in order to generate a measurable  
10 phase change between the returning echoes from two successive firings. At a Pulse  
11 Repetition Interval (PRI)=1/Pulse Repetition Frequency (PRF), the phase change between  
12 echoes from two successive firings is  $\Delta\theta = 2\pi f_d/\text{PRF}$ . Color image processors create a color  
13 velocity image by estimating  $\Delta\theta$  for each acoustic point, and then converting it into either  
14 Doppler frequency or velocity unit, which is then mapped to a 2D pixel display image  
15 according to a color versus velocity or Doppler frequency scale.

16 [0017] Since the instantaneous phase of the returning RF echo from each transmission of  
17 an ultrasonic beam is equivalent to the angle of its baseband I and Q components; *i.e.*,  $\theta = \tan^{-1}(Q/I)$ ,  
18 the phase change over two successive transmit and receive cycles is simply given by

$$\Delta\theta = \tan^{-1}(Q_1/I_1) - \tan^{-1}(Q_2/I_2).$$

20 [0018] In practice, there are two significant challenges in producing a real-time color flow  
21 image. First, the echoes returning from moving blood are generally very weak, so typically a  
22 packet of several or more transmit and receive cycles are needed to detect flow along a  
23 particular scan line. Color Doppler velocity estimation then involves computing the mean

1 phase change  $\langle \Delta\theta \rangle$  per PRI from the received echo signals. As will be defined in a later  
2 section, a common method of estimating  $\langle \Delta\theta \rangle$  is to evaluate the first-ordered autocorrelation  
3 function of  $\{I_n, Q_n\}$  over the transmit packet ( $n=1, 2, 3, \dots$ ) for each acoustic point in the medium  
4 under investigation. In other words the autocorrelation is between all possible pairs of  $\{I_n, Q_n\}$   
5 and  $\{I_m, Q_m\}$  at the same position, where n and m represent different time indices within a  
6 color Doppler data packet.

7 [0019] The second practical challenge stems from the fact that the tissue medium, and  
8 especially bones and tissue layers that comprise the vessel walls of the insonified blood vessel,  
9 often produce very strong reflections that are orders of magnitude larger than the  
10 backscattered signals from blood. Without first removing the clutter, the I/Q data analysis  
11 would be dominated by clutter effects and will not reflect the desired flow signal properties.  
12 To compound this problem, the reflecting structures in the medium under investigation (such  
13 as the body) are often moving at low velocities (due to breathing and/or cardiac motion, for  
14 example), which means the corresponding clutter signals may also contain Doppler frequency  
15 components or phase changes that can register as “color flashes” in the color flow image.

16 [0020] In order to provide a common framework for understanding the clutter problem,  
17 and the new and existing solutions, it is helpful to visualize (FIG. 1) the flow signal  
18 component and any unwanted DC or low-frequency clutter component in the Doppler  
19 frequency domain (even though color flow image processors don't actually need to compute  
20 the Doppler frequency spectrum from the input I/Q data.)

21 [0021] FIG. 1 is a plot 100 of spectra of clutter and flow components, and a High Pass  
22 Filter (HPF) frequency response. FIG. 1 shows frequency spectra of color flow I/Q data  
23 having a clutter spectrum 102, and a flow signal spectrum 104, and a HPF frequency response

1 (HPF1) 106 plotted on an x-axis 108 and y-axis 110. X-axis 108 is in units of Hertz (Hz), and  
2 y-axis 110 is in units of decibels (dB). The signal spectra 102 and 104 are normalized in  
3 magnitude such that the clutter spectrum peak is 0 dB. For the HPF response HPF1 106, 0 dB  
4 means the filter gain is unity at that particular frequency. In general, clutter spectrum 102  
5 could be the frequency spectrum of a stationary object (such as a bone) and/or of the relatively  
6 slow motion of other objects within the medium under investigation. For example, clutter  
7 spectrum 102 in FIG. 1 represents the reflected signal that contains a very low Doppler  
8 frequency spectrum ranging from 0 to about 30 Hz, with the peak at about 15 Hz. Flow  
9 spectrum 104 represents the frequency spectrum of a typical flow from a fluid such as blood  
10 within a medium under investigation.

11 [0022] In the body, tissue motion may be caused by breathing, cardiac motion, or simply  
12 transducer motion due to the operator, which are generally of a lower speed than blood flow in  
13 detectable vessels. The average power of the clutter may be up to 40 dB stronger than the  
14 flow signal in the time domain, so that the peak of clutter spectrum 102 may be 50 dB higher  
15 than that of flow spectrum 104.

16 [0023] Three approaches to clutter removal in conventional color flow imaging include  
17 using a High Pass Filter (HPF), using a Fast Fourier Transform (FFT), and using a clutter  
18 model. These are summarized as follows:

19 [0024] When using a HPF, having for example frequency response HPF1 106, the  
20 ultrasound signal from the transducer is passed through a linear high pass Finite Impulse  
21 Response (FIR) or Infinite Impulse Response (IIR) filter in the time domain. A high pass  
22 filter response such as HPF1 106 shows which frequency band is attenuated, and which  
23 frequency band is allowed to pass. The amplitude of the signal component at a given

1 frequency is reduced by the HPF1 106 response (e.g. -50 dB) at that frequency. For example  
2 at 460 Hz, the signal amplitude is reduced by -8 dB or about 40%. In the frequency domain,  
3 clutter spectrum 102 tends to concentrate around the lowest frequency bins. HPF1 106 is  
4 effective for rejecting the relatively low frequency clutter spectrum 102.

5 [0025] In FIG. 1, HPF1 106 corresponds to the frequency response of a filter whose -50  
6 dB stopband edge is at a normalized frequency (*i.e.*, a frequency divided by PRF/2) of 10%.

7 [0026] When using an FFT, the FFT is taken of basebanded I/Q data samples and then the  
8 power in the lowest frequency bins is set to zero. This can be viewed as frequency-domain  
9 filtering, or a form of clutter modeling in which the data is projected onto a series of complex  
10 exponentials of various Doppler shift frequencies.

11 [0027] When using a clutter model (*see, e.g.*, U.S. patent number 5,228,009 incorporated  
12 herein by reference) the part of data samples that represent the clutter (*e.g.*, the time domain  
13 representation of clutter spectrum 102) is projected onto a set of low order orthonormal basis  
14 functions (*e.g.*, Legendre polynomials), thereby forming a model or fitted curve of the clutter.  
15 Then the sum of projections (*i.e.*, the fitted curve) is subtracted from the data samples thereby  
16 subtracting the modeled clutter from the data. Using the low frequency components of a  
17 frequency spectrum (which may have been obtained via an FFT) to represent the clutter is a  
18 special case of clutter modeling.

19 [0028] In all the above three approaches, appropriate parameters are selected that depend  
20 on the tissue velocity, such that only the clutter and not the blood flow signal is subtracted  
21 from the data or suppressed. Choosing the appropriate parameters is equivalent to choosing  
22 the cutoff frequency (and the order) of the high pass filter or to selecting the highest order for  
23 the basis functions in the clutter modeling approach. If the filter cutoff is always set high to

1 reject the highest possible clutter frequencies, then some low flow signals may not be detected  
2 well. If the filter cutoff frequency is always set low, color flashes may result in the image  
3 whenever significant clutter power due to tissue motion is present above the cutoff frequency.  
4 Hence, various adaptive clutter suppression techniques have been proposed in the prior art as  
5 follows.

6 [0029] U.S. patent number 6,309,357 uses two or more clutter filters of different  
7 frequency responses to process each color data packet in parallel and then select or combine  
8 the best results for velocity estimation. U.S. patent numbers 5,349524 and 5,445,156 estimate  
9 clutter velocity and bandwidth using the standard autocorrelation method, and then either shift  
10 the clutter frequency down to DC before high pass filtering, or apply a complex filter with a  
11 notch at the estimated clutter frequency. U.S. patent number 5,349,525 estimates the clutter  
12 velocity and bandwidth and excise the corresponding bins in the FFT spectrum of the data.  
13 U.S. patent number 5,228,009 starts with the lowest order of basis functions (mean removal),  
14 computes and subtracts projections from the data onto the basis functions, and then checks the  
15 residual energy. The process is repeated for the next lowest order until residual energy falls  
16 below a predefined threshold.

17 [0030] In U.S. patent numbers 5,349524, 5,349,525, and 5,445,156, the velocity  
18 estimation is performed twice for each packet or acoustic point in the color flow image.  
19 Specifically, the velocity estimation is performed the first time to estimate mean clutter  
20 velocity, and the second time to estimate the mean flow velocity after the clutter has been  
21 subtracted out. Also, the standard autocorrelation method involves a division and an  
22 arctangent operation, which are computationally expensive. In U.S. patent number 5,228,009,  
23 as the order of filtering increases, the amount of computations required for computing the

1 projection onto the basis function based on the least squares criterion also increases and is  
2 quite computationally intensive.

3 [0031] In U.S. patent number 5,782,769, a high pass filter suitable for clutter from non-  
4 moving sources is applied prior to velocity estimation, and a separate nonlinear “min-max”  
5 filter is used across image frames to suppress color flashes that may result from tissue motion.  
6 While it is true that in general, color flashes can be rejected by such post processing or other  
7 simpler threshold techniques based on the total power and mean velocity estimates, if a  
8 weaker flow signal is also present, it will likely get thrown out with the flash artifact.

## SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0032] An adaptive clutter removal method is provided that can suppress color flash artifacts without compromising low flow detection. The method utilizes an adaptive high pass filter which is applied to the in-phase (I) and quadrature (Q) components of a given flow data packet prior to flow parameter estimation. The clutter may be detected and the cutoff frequency may be adjusted iteratively, may be adjusted on a point-by-point or region-by-region basis, and may be adjusted dynamically or in real time, while collecting the data for other acoustic points. For example, in an embodiment while data for one frame is imaged, a second frame is filtered, and a third frame is collected.

[0033] In an embodiment two criteria are used to detect the clutter, which are the magnitude of the total signal power being higher than a given threshold and the mean Doppler frequency (proportional to mean velocity) being lower than a given clutter frequency threshold. Ordinarily, calculating the mean frequency or phase change entails taking an arc tangent of the real and imaginary parts of the first order autocorrelation function of the I/Q data. However, determining whether the mean frequency change is less than a threshold does not require actually calculating the mean frequency change. Instead, in an embodiment, a check is performed to see if the real part times a multiplicative factor is greater than the absolute value of the imaginary part of the first order autocorrelation function. The multiplicative factor is determined by the ratio of a clutter frequency threshold to the pulse repetition frequency.

[0034] Although the method is equally applicable to I/Q flow data derived from 2D or 3D volume scanning based on conventional line-by-line beam forming, the preferred

1 embodiment, for which this is a continuation-in-part, is referred to as area forming which is  
2 enabled by broadbeam technologies. Broad beam technologies refer to systems and methods  
3 that include or take advantage of techniques for generating a broad ultrasound beam from a  
4 single ultrasonic pulse, and analyzing the returning echoes to yield multidimensional spatial  
5 information.

6 [0035] The receive system architecture for the preferred broad beam system utilizes  
7 software running on a set of Digital Signal Processing (DSP) chips to perform all of the  
8 image processing operations after area forming. Although the adaptive clutter filter can  
9 also be implemented in hardware, the programmability and scalability of DSP chips  
10 provide an ideal match to the algorithmic nature of the adaptive clutter filter. For  
11 example, to achieve more optimal clutter filter performance, the number of iterations and  
12 high pass filter choices can be increased in concert with technological advances in the  
13 DSP chip family.

14 [0036] Area forming is the process of producing, receiving, and analyzing RF echoes  
15 from a medium under investigation, that optionally includes apodization, steering,  
16 focusing, and aperture control, where a two-dimensional set of echolocation data can be  
17 generated using only one ultrasonic beam. Nonetheless, more than one ultrasonic beam  
18 may still be used with the area forming even though only one is necessary. Area forming  
19 is a process separate and distinct from beam forming. Area forming may yield an area of  
20 information using one transmit and/or receive cycle, in contrast to beam forming, which  
21 typically only processes a line of information per transmit and/or receive cycle.

22 [0037] Volume forming is the process of producing, receiving, and analyzing an  
23 ultrasonic beam, that optionally includes apodization, steering, focusing, and aperture

1 control, where a three dimensional set of echolocation data can be generated using only  
2 one ultrasonic beam. Nonetheless, multiple ultrasonic beams may be used although not  
3 necessary. Volume forming is a superset of area forming.

4 [0038] Multidimensional forming is the process of producing, receiving, and  
5 analyzing an ultrasonic beam that optionally includes apodization, steering, focusing, and  
6 aperture control. Using multidimensional forming a two or more dimensional set of  
7 spatial echolocation data can be generated with only one ultrasonic beam. Nonetheless,  
8 multiple ultrasonic beams may be used although not necessary. Multidimensional  
9 forming optionally includes non-spatial dimensions such as time and velocity.

1

## BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

- 2 [0039] FIG. 1 is a plot of spectra of clutter and flow components, and a HPF  
3 frequency response;
- 4 [0040] FIG. 2 is a plot of spectra of another clutter and flow components, and another  
5 HPF frequency response;
- 6 [0041] FIG. 3 is a plot of spectra of a color flow I/Q data packet, and another HPF  
7 frequency response;
- 8 [0042] FIG. 4 is a block diagram of one embodiment of an ultrasound system;
- 9 [0043] FIG. 5 shows an embodiment of the ultrasound system of FIG. 4;
- 10 [0044] FIG. 6 shows another embodiment of the ultrasound system of FIG. 4;
- 11 [0045] FIG. 7A is the main system block diagram for the ultrasound system of FIG. 5  
12 or FIG. 6.
- 13 [0046] FIG. 7B is block diagram showing processing blocks that process the signal  
14 within the image processor of FIG. 7A;
- 15 [0047] FIG. 8 is a flowchart for an adaptive clutter filtering method according to one  
16 embodiment of the invention of FIG. 7B; and
- 17 [0048] FIG. 9 is a plot of the first order autocorrelation estimate in the complex  
18 plane, and the bounds on its phase angle in the clutter frequency threshold test.

## **DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION**

2 [0049] FIG. 2 is another plot 200 of spectra of clutter and flow components of a color  
3 flow I/Q data packet having a clutter spectrum 202, a flow spectrum 204, and a high pass filter  
4 frequency response (HPF2) 206 plotted on an x-axis 108 and y-axis 110.

5 [0050] In contrast to HPF1 106 of FIG. 1, FIG. 2 shows HPF2 206 with a stopband cutoff  
6 frequency of 20%, which is needed to suppress a higher velocity clutter associated with tissue  
7 motion. Clutter spectrum 202 represents moving tissue such as a pumping heart and therefore  
8 has an overall higher frequency spectrum than that of clutter spectrum 102 (FIG. 1). Flow  
9 spectra 204 and 104 (FIG. 1) differ in their distribution of frequencies. Flow spectrum 204 is  
10 broader than flow spectrum 104 and overlaps with clutter spectrum 202. HPF2 206 has a  
11 higher cutoff frequency than HPF1 106 (FIG. 1), whereas flow spectrum 104 represents a  
12 lower velocity and has a lower mean frequency than flow spectrum 204. The selection of the  
13 HPF should be made so as to remove clutter spectrums 102 or 202 without significantly  
14 affecting flow spectrums 104 or 204. However, in plot 200 it is unclear exactly where the  
15 cutoff frequency should be because of clutter spectrum 202.

16 [0051] In conventional ultrasound systems, the wall (or clutter) filter cutoff frequencies of  
17 the HPF can be manually selected via front panel controls. In practice, however, the tissue  
18 motion often varies over the cardiac or breathing cycle, and from region to region within the  
19 color flow image. If, as in FIG. 2, the wall filter cutoff frequency is always set low, “color  
20 flashes” (regions having heavy concentrations of low frequency I/Q data) may result in the  
21 image whenever significant clutter power is present (*i.e.*, some is present above the cutoff  
22 frequency). Although it is possible to suppress color flashes by threshold techniques based on

1 the total power and mean velocity estimates, if a weaker flow signal is also present, it may get  
2 thrown out together with the flash artifact.

3 [0052] FIG. 3 is another plot 300 of spectra of the flow and clutter components of a color  
4 flow I/Q data packet showing a clutter spectrum 102, a flow spectrum 304, and high pass filter  
5 frequency response (HPF2) 206 plotted on an x-axis 108 and y-axis 110. FIG. 3 shows a  
6 situation in which low flow will be largely missed because of the high cutoff frequency of  
7 HPF2 206. In contrast to the effectiveness of HPF1 106 with respect to flow spectrum 104 or  
8 HPF2 206 with respect to flow spectrum 204, HPF2 206 would not be appropriate for flow  
9 spectrum 304 because it significantly attenuates flow spectrum 304 rather than leaving it  
10 relatively unaffected. Although HPF2 206 may be appropriate for acoustic points in parts of  
11 the image or some periods of time in which clutter spectrum 102 has a relatively high velocity,  
12 if the cutoff frequency remains high even when the clutter frequencies (e.g., clutter spectrum  
13 102) are at a later time or in a different part of the image near zero, low frequency flow  
14 information is lost.

15 [0053] FIG. 4 is a block diagram of an ultrasound system 400 according to an  
16 embodiment of the invention including an output system 402, an input system 404, a  
17 memory system 406, a processor system 408, a transducer system 410, a communications  
18 system 412, and an input/output system 414.

19 [0054] Output system 402 may include any one of, some of, any combination of, or  
20 all of a monitor system, a handheld display system, a printer system, a speaker system, a  
21 connection or interface system to a sound system, and/or a connection and/or interface  
22 system to a computer system, intranet, and/or internet, or the like. Input system 404 may  
23 include any one of, some of, any combination of, or all of a keyboard system, a mouse

1 system, a track ball system, a track pad system, buttons on a handheld system, a scanner  
2 system, a microphone system, a connection to a sound system, and/or a connection and/or  
3 interface system to a computer system, intranet, and/or internet or the like.

4 [0055] Input/output system 414 includes devices and/or systems that are both input  
5 and output devices such as a touch sensitive screen in which output is displayed on the  
6 screen and input is entered by touching the screen. Input/output system 414 is optional  
7 and may be in addition to or may replace input system 404 and/or output system 402.

8 Memory system 406 may include, for example, any one of, some of, any combination of,  
9 or all of a long term storage system, such as a hard drive; a short term storage system,  
10 such as random access memory; a removable storage system, such as a floppy drive or a  
11 removable drive; and/or flash memory. Processor system 408 may include any one of,  
12 some of, any combination of, or all of multiple parallel processors, a single processor, a  
13 system of processors having one or more central processors and/or one or more  
14 specialized processors dedicated to specific tasks. Transducer system 410 may include  
15 any one of, some of, any combination of, or all of one or more transducers, linear arrays  
16 of transducer elements, and/or two-dimensional arrays of transducer elements. A

17 different group of transducer elements may be chosen from the same array to obtain an  
18 image of a different aperture and/or different perspective. Transducer system 410 may  
19 also include acoustical systems for guiding and/or focusing the ultrasound beam, for  
20 example. Transducer system 410 may include antireflection layers and/or filters for  
21 filtering out noise, for example. Processor system 408 may include one or more  
22 specialized processors for controlling transducer system 410 and/or processing signals  
23 and/or data received by transducer system 410. An example of the construction of

1 transducer system 410 is shown in U.S. patent application number 10/039,910—  
2 publication number US 2002-0138002 A1—for a “System and Method for Coupling  
3 Ultrasound Generating Elements to Circuitry” filed October 6, 2001.

4 [0056] Communications system 412 communicatively links output system 402, input  
5 system 404, memory system 406, processor system 408, and transducer system 410 to  
6 each other. Communications system 412 may include any one of, some of, any  
7 combination of, or all of electrical cables, fiber optic cables, and/or means of sending  
8 signals through air or water, or the like, and may include the cableless connector of U.S.  
9 patent application number 10/039,910. Some examples of means of sending signals  
10 through air and/or water include systems for transmitting electromagnetic waves such as  
11 infrared and/or radio waves and/or systems for sending sound waves.

12 [0057] FIG. 5 shows an embodiment 500 of ultrasound system 400 having a monitor  
13 502, a keyboard 504, a mouse 506, a computing system 508, a transducer system 510,  
14 and cables 512. Monitor 502 may be touch sensitive or may be just for viewing. Monitor  
15 502 is part of output system 402 (FIG. 4). If monitor 502 is touch sensitive, it is part of  
16 input/output system 414 (FIG. 4). Keyboard 504 and mouse 506 are part of input system  
17 404 (FIG. 4), and are used to input text and/or select menu items, icons, virtual tabs  
18 and/or virtual buttons, for example. Computing system 508 includes processing system  
19 408 and memory system 406 (FIG. 4). Transducer system 510 is part of transducer  
20 system 410, and is used for transmitting (generating and receiving) ultrasound signals to a  
21 medium under investigation such as a human body.

22 [0058] FIG. 6 shows another embodiment 600 of ultrasound system 400.  
23 Embodiment 600 has an imaging unit 604, a display and control unit 606, which may also

1 be referred to as a Processing and Display Unit (PDU), and a docking unit 608. Imaging  
2 unit 604 includes an imaging module 610 and a transducer module 612. Display and  
3 control unit 606 includes two parts which are (1) a handle 614 having buttons 616 and (2)  
4 a monitor module 618 having a screen 620 displaying a GUI 621. Embodiment 600 uses  
5 hands 622 and 624.

6 [0059] Embodiment 600 is a hand-held device that can be operated with either hand  
7 622 or 624. Ultrasound system 400 may be any type of handheld ultrasound imaging  
8 unit, such as that of U.S. patent number 6,251,073.

9 [0060] Display and control unit 606 may be responsible for setting up, displaying,  
10 processing, storing, and annotating information gathered from imaging unit 604. The  
11 function of display and control unit 606 may include image reconstruction, color flow  
12 estimation, and Doppler computations, for example. Display and control unit 606 may  
13 include a Personal Digital Assistant (PDA). Display and control unit 606 may be battery  
14 operated, and screen 620 on display and control unit 606 may be touch sensitive. Handle  
15 614 is for holding display and control unit 606. User interactions with display and  
16 control unit 606 may be through buttons 616 on handle 614 and/or touch sensitive control  
17 areas on screen 620. In an embodiment (not shown), handle 614 could be replaced with a  
18 small keyboard or panel having buttons 616. Screen 620 displays GUI 621, which may  
19 have views of fixed formats and/or may give the user the option to retile or rearrange the  
20 windows of GUI 621 on the screen in any fashion desired.

21 [0061] In addition to a location for storing imaging unit 604 and/or display and  
22 control unit 606, docking unit 608 may be used for recharging imaging unit 604 and/or  
23 display and control unit 606. Alternatively, docking unit 608 may also be used for

1 downloading and/or uploading files to display and control unit 606. Alternatively,  
2 docking unit 608 may be used for both recharging and uploading and/or downloading  
3 files.

4 [0062] Imaging module 610 processes received RF echo data and converts it into a  
5 format that facilitates image processing by display and control unit 606. Imaging module  
6 610 is responsible for collecting and digitizing ultrasound data. Imaging module 610 also  
7 produces the signals to control and/or drive the transducers of the transducer array of  
8 transducer module 612.

9 [0063] Transducer module 612 includes an imaging ultrasound scan head having an  
10 array of transducer elements used to transmit ultrasound signals for data acquisition.  
11 Transducer module 612 converts electrical signals into acoustic signals and acoustic  
12 signals into electrical signals, for the purpose of transmitting and receiving the ultrasound  
13 information.

14 [0064] Monitor module 618 and any means, such as docking unit 608, of outputting  
15 information to a printer on another computer is part of output system 404 (FIG. 4).  
16 Buttons 616 and any means of inputting data (*e.g.*, patient information or images) from a  
17 computer system or database is part of input system 402 (FIG. 4). Imaging module 610  
18 and any processing and/or memory units within display and control unit 606 may include  
19 parts of or all of memory system 406 (FIG. 4) and/or processing system 408 (FIG. 4).  
20 Transducer module 612 is part of transducer system 410 (FIG. 4). If screen 620 is touch  
21 sensitive it can be included in input/output system 414. The cables and/or means for  
22 communicating through the air (using electromagnetic or sound signals) are part of  
23 communication system 412 (FIG. 4).

1       **[0065]**     In one embodiment (not shown), screen 620 and buttons 616 are located in  
2     different units. Buttons 616 could be placed on imaging unit 604. Imaging module 610  
3     and transducer module 612 do not have to be placed in the same unit. Imaging module  
4     610 could be placed in the same unit with screen 620 and buttons 616, or could be placed  
5     with only screen 620, while buttons 616 are on the same unit as only transducer module  
6     612. Alternatively, imaging unit 604 and display and control unit 606 could be placed  
7     together in one unit. The invention is not limited to a handheld system. Display and  
8     control unit 606 could be replaced with an appliance that is not handheld such as a laptop  
9     computer, personal computer, workstation, or mainframe computer, which may or may  
10    not include imaging module 610. The appliance that is not handheld (*e.g.*, a computer)  
11    may be programmed to perform the functions of imaging module 610 and display and  
12    control unit 606.

13      **[0066]**     Embodiments 500 and 600 or any embodiment of ultrasound system 400 may.  
14     provide a user interface that may include several intelligent (adaptive and context  
15     sensitive) active elements, *e.g.*, windows, soft buttons, tabs, menus, toolbars, and/or  
16     icons.

17      **[0067]**     In one embodiment, GUI 621 interface is voice controlled, and the user can  
18     train the device to recognize a set of words or combinations of words. Each recognizable  
19     unit (word or word combination) can be assigned to a device command, performing a  
20     specific function or a sequence of functions. Some or all functions can be voice activated  
21     obviating or partially obviating the use of hand controls. A similar GUI can be provided  
22     for embodiment 500 or any of the embodiments of ultrasound system 400.

23      **[0068]**     FIG. 7A shows the main system block diagram 700 for an embodiment of

1 ultrasound system 400 that supports B-mode and color flow imaging, input system 404,  
2 having a transducer array 710, a transmitter 711, a T/R 712, RF data 713, electronic  
3 receive channels 714, area former 716, I/Q signals 726, display unit 730, memory buffer  
4 732, image processor 734, master controller 736, and control signals 738.

5 [0069] Master controller 736 receives and interprets inputs from the user, for example  
6 via input system 404, and sends control signals 738 (dashed lines) to activate and  
7 coordinate the functions of various subsystems in order to effect the changes requested by  
8 input system 404. In an embodiment master controller 736 may include control software  
9 running on a microprocessor.

10 [0070] T/R 712 represents hardware switches that connect transducer array 710 to  
11 either transmitter 711 or receive channels 714. For example, during a transmit event, T/R  
12 712 may connect transducer array 710 to transmitter 711, and during a receive event, T/R  
13 712 may connect transducer array 710 to receive channels 714. The state of T/R 712 may  
14 be controlled through transmitter 711 as illustrated or directly by master controller 736.

15 [0071] Transmitter 711 produces the signals for causing transducer array 710 to  
16 produce, focus, and steer an ultrasound beam. Receive channels 714 are parallel analog  
17 circuits that amplify and filter the signals received from transducer elements that form the  
18 active receive aperture of transducer array 710.

19 [0072] In the ultrasound art the terms “insonation” and “insonify” refer to filling a  
20 volume with sound and are analogous to the optical terms “illumination” and  
21 “illuminate.” In an embodiment of Broadbeam Technologies, a broad beam is generated  
22 by transmitter 711 and transducer array 710 to insonify an entire sector (in case of a  
23 phased array) or parallelogram (in case of a linear array) in a single transmission. After

1 amplification and noise filtering of the received echo data in receive channels, area  
2 former 716 performs the receive apodization, beam steering and focusing operations on a  
3 point by point basis within the insonified area. Area former 716 also performs  
4 digitization and frequency downshifting operations to produce I/Q signals 726 having I/Q  
5 components of the 2D echolocation data for image detection and processing.

6 [0073] The I/Q data of I/Q signals 726 generated by area former 716 can be stored in  
7 memory buffer 732. Storing the I/Q data in memory buffer 732 is especially important in  
8 color flow imaging, in which a packet of, for example, 10 transmit pulses are repeatedly  
9 fired at some predetermined PRF depending on depth and velocity scale settings, to  
10 insonify each broad beam transmit zone. That is, for each acoustic point within a  
11 transmit zone, 10 I/Q data samples must be accumulated and stored in memory buffer  
12 732 over a period of N/PRF (or more) to form a color packet of N I/Q points for color  
13 flow processing.

14 [0074] Image processor 734 may include one or more digital signal processing (DSP)  
15 chips that are dedicated to image processing for both B-mode and color flow. The DSP  
16 chip or chips allow image processor 734 to be highly programmable and re-configurable  
17 for real-time implementation of a wide range of algorithms including data-adaptive  
18 algorithms. Image processor 734 also performs scan conversion and video processing to  
19 produce raster scan or XY pixel data to form video or still images on display unit 730.  
20 The specific processing steps required for color flow imaging will be described in  
21 conjunction with FIG. 7B.

22 [0075] Transducer 710 is part of transducer system 410. Display unit 730 is part of  
23 output system 402. Control signals (dashed lines) are transmitted via parts of

1 communications systems 412. Any part of, any one of, any combination of parts of, or all  
2 of transmitter 711, T/R 712, and/or receive channels 714, area former 716, memory  
3 buffer 732, image processor 734, and master controller 736 may be any one of or any  
4 combination of hardware, firmware, and/or software and may be included in any one of  
5 or any combination of transducer system 410, processor 408, and/or memory 406.

6 [0076] FIG. 7B is a block diagram showing processing blocks that process the signal  
7 within image processor 734 for color flow and B-mode having I/Q data 744, B-mode  
8 branch 746, Color Flow (CF) branch 748, B-mode processing block 750, adaptive clutter  
9 filter 752, zeroth and first order autocorrelation estimates R0 and R1, flow parameter  
10 estimation 758, post processing 760, scan converter 762, and video processing 764.

11 [0077] Each block of FIG. 7B may represent parts of one or more software programs,  
12 firmware and/or circuitry dedicated for performing the function specified. Since B-mode  
13 may provide anatomical echo data surrounding the flow regions in a color flow image,  
14 some time may be allotted for B-mode transmit events and I/Q data 744 acquisition even  
15 during color flow imaging. I/Q data 744 is generated from I/Q signals 726. I/Q data 744  
16 of B-mode branch 746 is fed into B-mode processing block 750, which includes  
17 magnitude detection, filtering, and log compression operations.

18 [0078] In the Color Flow (CF) branch 748, each packet of color flow I/Q data that  
19 corresponds to a specific acoustic point within the color ROI, is passed through adaptive  
20 clutter filter 752, which removes the clutter from slow moving or stationary sources in  
21 the medium under investigation such as a human body. Adaptive clutter filter 752  
22 outputs the filtered I/Q data, and in the preferred embodiment, adaptive clutter filter 752  
23 also outputs the zeroth and first order autocorrelation estimates R0 and R1, which can be

1 used directly for flow parameter estimation 758 including flow signal energy, mean  
2 Doppler frequency/velocity, and flow velocity variance estimation, for example. Post  
3 processing 760 includes thresholding to reject estimates that may be corrupted by noise,  
4 and/or spatial and/or temporal filtering to enhance overall image quality. Both color flow  
5 and background B-mode acoustic image data are sent to scan converter 762 and are scan  
6 converted based on the known scan format, to produce XY (raster scan) pixel data.  
7 Video processing 764 includes combining the color and B-mode data into a single image  
8 frame based on predetermined write priority rules, and applying selected color maps (*e.g.*  
9 red, green, blue values) to represent the flow signal parameter (*e.g.*, mean velocity) in  
10 color, and selected gray maps to represent the B-mode background echo data.

11 [0079] FIG. 8 is a flowchart for an adaptive clutter filtering method 800 according to  
12 an embodiment of the invention. Although image processor 734 is included in the  
13 embodiment of FIG. 7A, method 800 may be implemented as hardware, software, and/or  
14 firmware within the color flow processor of any ultrasound system that processes the I/Q  
15 data 744 (from I/Q signals 726) from all spatial locations within a user specified ROI in  
16 the line, plane, or volume of insonation, regardless of which transmit and receive system  
17 and focusing processes are used to acquire I/Q signals 726.

18 [0080] In step 801, labeled “Store I/Q Data in DSP Buffer,” takes I/Q data 744 from  
19 memory buffer 732 and stores I/Q data 744 in a DSP buffer. Memory buffer 732 may  
20 store many frames of I/Q data, while the DSP buffer stores a smaller amount of I/Q data  
21 such as a single frame or a portion of a frame. In step 802, labeled “Grab I/Q Data From  
22 DSP Buffer,” one or more packets of I/Q data 744 that correspond to one or more  
23 acoustic points within the color ROI, are read from memory buffer 732. In step 804,

1 labeled “Apply HPF to I/Q Data,” the I/Q data 744 is passed through an HPF loaded with  
2 a pre-selected set of filter coefficients. The sets of HPF coefficients for a range of  $N_f$   
3 cutoff frequency settings (or parameters) is predetermined and stored in memory buffer  
4 732 for each color flow imaging setup, which may include, but is not limited to, probe  
5 type, transmit frequency, application type, packet size and PRF. The HPF may be  
6 implemented using standard FIR or IIR filters. The HPF coefficients may range from a  
7 simple FIR filter [1,-1] to higher order filters involving 10 or more real and/or complex  
8 coefficients. For the purpose of this disclosure, the term “cutoff frequency setting” of an  
9 HPF is used to characterize its clutter rejection power at different frequencies. That is, a  
10 higher cutoff setting may entail more than just choosing a filter with a higher stopband  
11 cutoff frequency at, for example, the –50 dB level, but also changing the filter order,  
12 sharpness, and/or shape of the HPF transition band. The HPF cutoff frequency settings  
13 may be adjusted by changing which HPF coefficients are used and/or the values of the  
14 HPF coefficients and/or any other parameters associated with the HPF. As examples of  
15 other parameters, the filtering operation can conceivably be implemented in the  
16 frequency domain by multiplying the FFT of the signal with a filter function, and then  
17 converting the result back to the time domain. In that implementation, the filter  
18 parameters may specify a characteristic function (*e.g.*, Butterworth, Chebychev) that  
19 represents the frequency response of the filter. The characteristic function may have  
20 parameters other than frequency as inputs, such as the number of terms. The ordering of  
21 the filters may depend upon the type of clutter expected. Basically, the lowest cutoff  
22 setting should be used in absence of clutter, while the highest cutoff setting is designed to  
23 eliminate the highest possible clutter frequencies associated with tissue motion.

1 [0081] In an embodiment, the HPF cutoff frequency setting is automatically adjusted  
2 for each I/Q data packet on a packet by packet basis (*i.e.*, one packet per acoustic point).

3 An iterative search algorithm may be performed to find the optimal HPF cutoff frequency  
4 that is just high enough to remove all the clutter.

5 [0082] In step 806, labeled “Compute Magnitude and Mean Frequency Indices,”  
6 some indices of the magnitude and mean frequency of filtered I/Q data are computed.  
7 The quantities computed during step 806 are for the purpose of carrying out step 808. In  
8 step 808, labeled “Test for Clutter,” tests are performed using the quantities computed in  
9 step 806 to test for the presence of clutter. A criterion for determining and/or detecting  
10 the presence of clutter is when the magnitude of the filtered I/Q data is greater than a  
11 certain threshold and/or whether the absolute value of the mean frequency shift (the  
12 average phase change per PRI) is lower than a certain clutter frequency threshold.

13 Mathematically these clutter presence criteria can be written as

14           Magnitude > clutter magnitude threshold?

15 and/or

16           | Mean phase change /PRI | < clutter frequency threshold?

17 [0083] There are many measures that can be used to quantify the signal magnitude  
18 and mean frequency/phase change to detect the presence of clutter. For example, the  
19 magnitude may be represented by the total signal energy, E, which is given by

20            $E = \sum [I^2(n) + Q^2(n)],$

21 or by

22            $\sum [|I(n)| + |Q(n)|],$

23 where n = 1, 2, 3, ..., is the time index, and the summation is over all n within the packet.

1 The total signal energy E is equivalent to the zero order autocorrelation ( $R_0$ ) of the  
2 filtered signal. A rough estimate of the mean frequency can be obtained using a zero-  
3 crossing counter (*i.e.*, measuring the frequency by counting of the number of times the  
4 signal crosses the zero line over a known time period), while an accurate but inefficient  
5 method of calculating the mean frequency is to compute the centroid (see, for example,  
6 U.S. Patent No. 5,349524, cited above) of the FFT of the data samples, for example. In  
7 the preferred embodiment, the first order autocorrelation function of the filtered data is  
8 calculated by

9 
$$R_1 = \sum_{n=2}^N [I(n-1) + jQ(n-1)] * [I(n) - jQ(n)].$$

10 where the summation is over all n time indices within a packet, and N is the number of  
11 flow samples per packet. From  $R_1$  the mean phase change  $\langle\Delta\theta\rangle$  per PRI can be  
12 computed as

13 
$$\langle\Delta\theta\rangle = (1/\pi) \text{ang}(R_1),$$

14 where  $\text{ang}(\cdot)$  denotes the phase angle of a complex quantity. Note that evaluation of  
15  $\text{ang}(R_1)$  involves forming the ratio of its imaginary to real part, and an arc tangent  
16 operation, both relatively expensive for real-time implementation. However, at this stage  
17 in the algorithm, it is not necessary to obtain precise estimates of the magnitude and mean  
18 phase/frequency change. Rather, it suffices to know whether these are larger or smaller  
19 than predefined thresholds. Hence, in one embodiment, the criterion that the absolute  
20 value of the mean frequency change  $|\langle f \rangle| = |\langle\Delta\theta\rangle|/\text{PRI}$  is less than some clutter  
21 frequency threshold  $f_{Th}$ , is equivalent to asking if the following is true:

22 
$$|\langle\Delta\theta\rangle| = (1/\pi) |\text{ang}(R_1)| < f_{Th}/\text{PRF}$$

1 which can be re-written as

2  $|\text{ang}(R1)| < \pi (f_{Th}/\text{PRF})$ .

3 [0084] An alternative criterion for determining and/or detecting the presence of  
4 clutter is to compare a composite index that is some function of both the magnitude and  
5 mean frequency of the filtered signal, against a single threshold.

6 [0085] FIG. 9 is a plot 900 of the first order autocorrelation R1 estimated in the  
7 complex plane having vertical axis 902 and horizontal axis 904, and the bounds 906 and  
8 908 on its phase angle in the clutter frequency threshold test of step 808 of FIG. 8. R1 is  
9 viewed as a vector in the complex plane where the vertical axis 902 represents the  
10 imaginary axis, and the horizontal axis represents the real axis. In practice, the smallest  
11 PRF setting available to the user is at least 2 times larger than the clutter frequency;  
12 hence, it is reasonable to assume that  $f_{Th}/\text{PRF} < \frac{1}{2}$ . This means that the above angle test  
13 is equivalent to asking if R1 falls within a sector bounded by  $\pm\alpha$ , where  $\alpha = \pi(f_{Th}/\text{PRF}) <$   
14  $\pi/2$ ; i.e.,  $\alpha$  is within the right half-plane.

15 [0086] Since  $\text{ang}(R1) = \tan^{-1}(y/x)$  in the right half-plane (where x and y denote the  
16 real and imaginary parts of R1, respectively) the mean phase/frequency criterion for  
17 determining the presence of clutter is equivalent to

18  $|y| < x * C$ ,

19 in which  $C = \tan(\pi f_{Th}/\text{PRF})$  is a positive-valued constant that can be predetermined as a  
20 function of PRF.

21 [0087] To summarize, the clutter in the filtered I/Q data packet can be detected by  
22 testing if

23 Magnitude index > clutter magnitude threshold

1 and if

2  $|y| < x^*C.$

3 In general, the magnitude and clutter frequency thresholds are both dependent on  
4 iteration number. For example, as the cutoff frequency setting increases, the frequency  
5 threshold for clutter would also likely need to be adjusted.

6 [0088] Referring again to FIG. 8, step 808 includes exit conditions, which if met  
7 continues method 800 to step 810, which will be discussed below. The exit conditions  
8 may include a determination that no clutter is present or that all available HPF cutoff  
9 frequency settings have been selected, tested, and determined to be inadequate for  
10 removing the clutter. If the exit conditions are not met and there still remain HPF cutoff  
11 frequency settings that have not been selected and tested, method 800 proceeds to step  
12 812, labeled “Select Next HPF Cutoff Frequency Settings” in which the next cutoff  
13 frequency setting is selected depending on which cutoff frequency settings have been  
14 tested. Step 812 produces inputs that affect step 814, labeled, “Load Selected HPF  
15 Cutoff Frequency Settings.” In step 814 the selected HPF cutoff frequency setting (*e.g.*,  
16 FIR filter coefficients) is loaded into the HPF of step 804. Depending on the processing  
17 power available and on the frame rate requirements, a suitable number ( $N_f$ ) of HPF cutoff  
18 frequency setting selections will be available for selection in the iterative scheme. The  
19 order in which HPF cutoff frequency settings are selected is based on how much clutter  
20 they reject. For example, if there are only two HPF cutoff frequency settings to choose  
21 from ( $N_f=2$ ), the initially selected HPF cutoff frequency setting is the one having the low  
22 frequency cutoff setting, and if after filtering with the initially chosen HPF cutoff  
23 frequency setting the clutter is still present, the higher cutoff frequency setting is applied.

1    [0089]    For  $N_f > 2$ , at least two search strategies or preferred embodiments are possible  
2    including a sequential search (starting with an extreme cutoff frequency setting) and a  
3    binary search (starting with the middle cutoff frequency setting of the predetermined  
4    range). The advantage of the sequential search is that the minimum number of iterations  
5    is one. In other words, no further iterations are necessary if the filtered signal is deemed  
6    free of clutter after the first pass. Whereas, with a binary search, at least two iterations  
7    are needed for each data packet. However, if  $N_f$  is large, a binary search tends to  
8    converge faster onto the optimal HPF cutoff frequency setting than a sequential search.

9    [0090]    For a binary search, an HPF cutoff frequency setting in the middle of the  
10   cutoff frequency range is first applied to I/Q signals 744. In a binary search, if the clutter  
11   threshold test for the first iteration is negative (*i.e.*, magnitude not too large and mean  
12   frequency not too low), then the magnitude and R1 estimates are stored in memory buffer  
13   732 or another part of memory system 406 and the next lower cutoff frequency setting is  
14   chosen to re-process I/Q signals 744, and the above threshold tests are repeated until an  
15   exit condition occurs. An exit condition in a binary search is finding two consecutively  
16   ordered filters, one with a positive result for the threshold test and one with a negative  
17   result for the threshold test. An exit condition in a sequential search may be when either  
18   a status change occurs (*e.g.*, the clutter test becomes positive), in which case the cutoff  
19   frequency setting of the previous iteration must be optimal, and the corresponding stored  
20   magnitude and R1 values are used or when no status changes (*i.e.*, the clutter test remains  
21   negative) even when the lowest cutoff frequency setting is reached, in which case the  
22   lowest setting will be used. In an alternative embodiment of a sequential search the status  
23   change may be that the clutter test becomes negative, in which case the cutoff frequency

1 setting of the present iteration is selected.

2 [0091] If, on the other hand, the clutter threshold tests for the first iteration prove  
3 positive (*i.e.*, significant clutter is still present), then the original I/Q data packet is  
4 reprocessed at a higher cutoff frequency setting, and the above steps are repeated until  
5 one of the two exit conditions as described above is true.

6 [0092] In practice, only a small number of iterations may be needed before reaching  
7 the point of diminishing returns. It is expected that for many applications even  $N_f=2$  may  
8 suffice. Compared to prior adaptive wall filter methods that always perform mean  
9 frequency estimation twice for each acoustic point, the present algorithm that chooses  
10 between a “high” and a “low” cutoff frequency setting ( $N_f=2$ ) should be more  
11 computationally efficient in at least two ways. First, if the initial (low) filter cutoff  
12 frequency setting is chosen properly, an additional iteration (high cutoff frequency  
13 setting) is needed only if tissue motion is detected (which occurs over only a fraction of  
14 the cardiac or breathing cycle, and in a portion of the image pixels). Second, the angle  
15 estimate, which requires a division and an arctangent operation, needs only be computed  
16 once. Specifically, the arc tangent only needs to be calculated in step 810 after the  
17 second or final iteration.

18 [0093] In general, the number of iterations can vary from acoustic point to acoustic  
19 point for each image frame. A higher level of processing control based on some global  
20 criteria may be used to maintain a more consistent or predictable processing time per  
21 image frame. Many different global criteria are possible. For example, one global  
22 criterion could be if tissue motion (that prompts the use of higher filter cutoff frequency  
23 settings) is detected in a predefined percentage of the acoustic points (*e.g.*, 40%) within

1 the user-selected color flow ROI, then the next higher filter cutoff frequency setting may  
2 be set as the default filter in an attempt to speed up (one less iteration) the processing of  
3 the remaining pixels, at the expense of potentially missing a portion of the lowest flow  
4 components in some of the remaining pixels (which should not be a serious sacrifice). A  
5 second global criterion could be if a full-size ROI is selected by the user, then the larger  
6 number of iterations N is allowed only for a central area within the ROI. These two  
7 global criteria could be used separately or in combination. The use of a higher number of  
8 iterations in the central area assumes the user is mainly interested in the flow in that  
9 central area, but the higher number of iterations could be applied to other parts of the ROI  
10 instead, depending on the interests of the user. The user may be given the option of  
11 choosing the region within the ROI that allows for more than one iteration. In the  
12 extreme case, no iterations may be allowed outside the central area, or another area  
13 chosen by the user, of the ROI.

14 [0094] No matter the search method, upon meeting the exit conditions method 800  
15 proceeds to step 810 labeled “Compute Flow Parameters,” in which flow parameters are  
16 computed to a precision adequate for the color encoded display. The flow parameters  
17 refer to the mean Doppler frequency/velocity, and/or total Doppler power, and other  
18 standard flow related parameters including velocity variance, as required by the user  
19 selected color flow imaging mode. In the velocity imaging mode, the mean velocity is  
20 color coded for image display. In the power Doppler imaging mode, the total power is  
21 color coded for display. Depending on which parameters are used for testing the  
22 magnitude and mean frequency in the adaptive algorithm, some of the results such as  
23 total energy or power (R0) and autocorrelation estimates (R1) for the optimal HPF setting

1 can be used directly or in part for the computations of the needed flow parameters.

2 [0095] Although in the above description the clutter was derived from stationary

3 and/or relatively slow moving tissues and the flow under investigation was relatively fast

4 moving, such as blood, the same method can be applied in situations in which the clutter

5 is the relatively fast moving fluid flow and the flow under investigation are stationary

6 and/or relatively slow moving objects, except a low pass filter would be used rather than

7 a HPF. Also, the same method might be used to select an optimal band pass or notch

8 filter if there is high frequency and low frequency clutter. In another embodiment both

9 the clutter information and the information of the rest of the frequency spectrum may be

10 of interest. Consequently, rather than discarding the clutter information, it is extracted

11 and analyzed and/or processed with or without the rest of the spectrum. For example,

12 when the motion under investigation is the movement of a tissue wall, such as the heart,

13 the high frequency flow spectrum of the blood is the clutter.

14 [0096] Although the invention has been described with reference to specific

15 embodiments, it will be understood by those skilled in the art that various changes may

16 be made and equivalents may be substituted for elements thereof without departing from

17 the true spirit and scope of the invention. In addition, modifications may be made

18 without departing from the essential teachings of the invention.